

# CARELESS RILEY BUYS THE SUPPER

Entry No. 50 in Our Prize Story Competition

By WALLACE IRWIN



"My Good Fellow, Marry a Sensible Woman, Buy a Farm, and Stay There."

B UDDHA came to earth under seven hundred different aspects, Orientalists tell me. I am no Buddhist statistic; but I am under the impression that Mr. Careless Riley, as he scuntered along an alley leading from Chinatown to the lower Bowery, trailed behind him more aliases than ever Buddha shed in the doing of good works. Buddha wore his dignity with meekness too, and Riley did the same; but on the night wherein our story opens his modest demeanor was more like that of the successful Wall Street operator who has cleaned up a vast fortune by dint of an unexpected coup. Careless Riley's jaunty smile burned furtively. You have seen that expression, perhaps, on the face of your hostess at dinner when she is listening to your college stories at the same time she smells something burning in the kitchen. Conscience, the friend of thieves, had cried, "Jigger—the Cop!" and Riley was taking the tip. He realized his duty to himself and his profession—he should be at this moment on a fast train speeding West. But a foolish human problem made him hesitate in the very shadow of the Law. There were, in fact, two women in the case of the People vs. Riley, burglar.

By a sharp twinge under his vest Riley realized that the point of a pearl and sapphire stickpin had worked through his pocket and was jabbing him in the ribs. Yet he made no attempt to remove it; for that identical inside pocket contained a corsair's prize in jumbled treasure. There was fifty-six hundred and eighty dollars in assorted bills, there were two or three gem studded watches, a necklace of forty magnificent pearls, several gentlemanly rings set with stones of purest water, a fabulously expensive cigarette case, a set of pigeon-blood sleeve links with studs and buttons to match—oh, yes, and enough miscellaneous small loot to deck a prima donna or a Christmas tree.

But the most experienced operator cannot avoid a certain surge of elation that rises tickle within him after the Big Clean-up. To do Careless Riley justice, he had made many handsoner hauls than this; but never before one that had come so easy. Almost it made him ashamed. It had been so unprofessional—to approach an uptown mansion at half-past eight in the evening, see no lights but in the servants' hall, climb up the vines to the third story, find the window needlingly unlatched, crawl into a bedroom of ornate splendor, rifle the apartment at his ease, smoke the master's Egyptian cigarettes, and finally, after half an

hour of luxurious leisure spent in wandering about the house and admiring its objects of virtue, to descend by the main staircase and make his exit through the front door.

"Just like stealin' dead pigs from a Chinese funeral!" said Riley half regretfully.

Outside the Friendly Shelter Mission—so called because of its bleak and forbidding front, perhaps—three limousine cars stood clannishly together and glared with bright and scornful lamps upon the misery of the district. A crowd of the weary, the beggry, and the brazen had gathered at the mission entrance, with that air of wavering skepticism common in a realm so blessed that a man need never think more than one drink ahead. Occasionally a tattered wreck of manhood would pause with a weak smile, turn, and totter up the stairs to the hall above. Old Mother Misery's hopeful twins, Flotsam and Jetsam, were among those present.

"Swoll giuk from Fifti' Avenue up dere passin' out a bull con about de blessin's o' poverty," quoth Flotsam from out the tangle of wreckage.

"Any cats in it?" asked Jetsam the calculating.

"No cats," answered Flotsam. "Dey never run a dinit' car on de Hot Air Express."

Careless Riley patted down the thick roll in his pocket and passed up stairs with the mob. The hard benches in the assembly hall were brimming over with rank humanity as he entered and sandwiched himself among the standees along the wall.

AN anburn tenor with white eyelashes was singing a dreary solo entitled "Comfort" to the notes of a saw melodeon. Like a flood display on the platform sat a group of six or seven individuals set off from the rest by the black and white of their evening dress and the glitter of their jeweled plumage. Hudson Montmort Hubert, wearing white gloves and an orchid, occupied center stage.

I was going to say that Mr. Hubert was a philanthropist; but why call names? I am not one of those who put the worst possible construction on the deeds of the Very Rich. To do him justice, he was more intelligent than was necessary in his habitual surroundings. Honest, theoretical, sincere, he was rather an exaggerated type of the millionaire reformer. He was of the tribe who seek to find Life on the library shelf and offer balm for Poverty without realizing what the word

really means. Yet Hubert had accepted the mission's invitation in good faith and had come eagerly bearing his message to the poor.

It was after ten o'clock, and the mob was impatient for its parable of social enlightenment. Mr. Hubert had dined with Mrs. Bontrac-Gay and her daughter, who now occupied chairs at his right. They were interested, like himself, in the Lower Classes; and they had acquired by diligent study proficiency in that sort of Plutocratic Socialism sometimes tolerated on the marble-crested hills of Rhode Island, where a few mental gymnasts are able to read Bernard Shaw with the right hand and keep tab on the Blue Book with the left.

Hubert rose slowly from his chair. His white-gloved hand trembled as he began his speech somewhat falteringly. Whiskey Charley, the Mission's awful example, awoke suddenly at the first words and nodded audibly. "Ain't it terrible what the poor has to stand?" and was led out of the hall weeping bitterly.

"My friends," said the speaker earnestly, "I am glad this privilege has been granted me, because my position in life has made it extremely difficult for me to meet the Poor face to face and speak to them frankly. I am glad of the opportunity to set right, as far as my powers permit, the all too prevalent impression that Wealth is the natural enemy of Poverty and that the only true happiness finds sanctuary in the mansions of Fifth-ave. And if anything I can do or say will do might to strengthen a bond of sympathy and understanding between my Class and yours, I shall feel that I have not spoken empty words here tonight.

"For the misery of the Poor and the excesses of the Rich many remedies have been devised, foredoomed to failure. It has even been proposed that all the land and treasure of the world be massed together and partitioned, share and share alike, to every man, woman, and child. How hollow this expedient in a world of unequal gifts! No, my friends, Wealth and Poverty must balance the measure of life so long as our planet swings in the circle of the sun."

A dull grunt seemed to travel the length of the hall. The Poor of the district had come to hear their virtues praised. And nowhere is praise more valued than on the Bowery—unless it be on Fifth-ave.

"Between the Rich and Poor of our country today there seems to exist a growing dislike, while the fires of class hostility are everywhere lighted by reformers and

fanned by demagogues. And the curse of all our misunderstanding is greed—greed of the Rich and greed of the Poor; the lust for other people's money that prompts the legislator to reach out for bribes and the girl of the people to bicker for the string of pearls which she will wind round her throat till conscience is strangled and honor dead."

The string of stolen pearls in Riley's pocket seemed to stir nervously.

"What I wish to advocate, Friends," went on the speaker, "is a more intelligent understanding between us, the upper and the lower strata of Society. Neither class has any monopoly on happiness. We are mortal men and women together, neither wholly bad nor utterly good. I may stand here in garments better tailored than your own; yet I somehow cannot help feeling that the millionaire has rather the short end of it in the race of life. Real happiness is Achievement, and the millionaire starts in the race with golden chains obstructing his feet. Luxury itself becomes a burden; and the humble, honest mechanic is more favored in his privilege to strive, to suffer, and to earn than we of the overfed, overclothed, and underdisciplined Circle which I call my own."

ALEXANDER envying Diogenes! Dives comforting Lazarus with sophistries! His talk, really delivered straight from the heart, seemed an academic sarcasm to the crowd whose hunger was an ever present Now. You cannot sing pastorals to the sewer digger of Eighth-ave., nor sagas of simplicity to the fallen heroes thirsting for beer drippings around the saloons of Chatham Square.

Fert shuffled impatiently while Hudson Montmort Hubert, with intentioned theorist that he was, gave a dozen reasons why he did not himself shun the mockery of Society and cast his lot with the under dog. But, though the more candid part of the audience sneered softly, Flotsam and Jetsam, hypocritically attentive on the front row, cheered each inflicting sentiment with unnatural enthusiasm. They were no scholars; yet beggary had taught them the lesson of splendor; degenerate Rome: throw the glad hand when the Swell Guy spicks, and free grub will follow as the night the day.

The speech went on. The Curse of Extravagance was now being compared in detail with the Blessing of Frugality.

"Gee, what a bull con!" muttered a freckled, decent looking longshoreman who stood next to Riley.

One of the speaker's climaxes was greeted with scattered applause. Mr. Hudson Montmort Hubert bowed, pleased by their cheers. But a moment of confidence turned his discourse down an unexpected and dangerous lane.

"As the curse of Riches is Fatness, so the curse of Poverty is Hunger," he said. "And what is the cure for Hunger? Charity? I think not. The easy giving of alms to every outstretched hand has never gone far toward relieving real misery. Charity is an opiate, not a remedy. Burdened though I be by the weight of vast wealth, yet I would not have it on my conscience that I have pauperized one self-respecting man by the debasing practice of almsgiving. Better the Poor should starve, my friend, in the saving consciousness of a fight well fought, than that they should fatten in unearned idleness. And yet the question still persists, What is the cure for Hunger?" Mr. Hubert paused, one snowy glove held aloft.

"I'll be de goat, what's de answer?" inquired the fickle Flotsam ironically.

"The cure is Work!" shouted the speaker above the shuffle of feet. "Honest, steady employment brings happiness and prosperity."

"Where can y' git a job when y' ain't got none?" asked an emaciated Hebrew from the middle of the hall.

"Er— you can find it, no doubt, by applying to the proper authorities," said Mr. Hudson Montmort Hubert, flushing slightly. "And now let us pass to the second and more important phase of the question."

The speech went no further. The big room became boisterous with a titter of sarcastic, disagreeable laughter.

"Move de heart!"—"Cut it out!"—"When do we eat?"—"Free beer!"—"Make it champagne!" upstaged the huddle as the crowd became impatient, gesticulating, Rogues! fellows jumped on benches with a yelping "Aw-ew-ew!" the American substitute for the British "Boo!" The richly gowned women on the platform rose nervously, while the men of the Hubert party stood protectively to the fore. Someone threw an orange peel.

"Nix on the rough stuff—dere's ladies up dere!" growled the freckled longshoreman to Careless Riley, as together they braced their big shoulders and fought their way forward to the platform where the mission superintendent and his evening-dressed visitors were hastening to conduct the women to a side door.

Riley swung himself to the platform with the agility of an experienced porch climber. A red faced tramp attempted to follow; but the freckled longshoreman tripped him over a piano stool.

"You mutts!" shouted Riley in a voice of brass as he faced the seething audience. "Chuse it, I've heur?" The clamor subsided to an occasional grumbling note. "I've got a gun in me clothes, and I swear to God any boob that wants to start somethin' can do it right now!"

Riley thrust his hand suggestively under the cheeks of his seedy coat. There was no gun there; but he could feel the string of pearls coiled snake-like round the loot. The crowd looked foolish, as is customary in both train robberies and directors' meetings when a number of people are suddenly brought face to face with the fact that they are being held up by one man.

The Fifth-ave. contingent was now withdrawing gradually toward an obscure exit. Two large policemen

suddenly loomed up in the rear of the hall. The crowd began withdrawing quietly, and Riley, at sight of his natural enemies, hurried down the dark stairway where Hubert and his friends were slowly winding their way toward the street. He had joyful anticipations of a fight outside.

AS he stepped into the street he saw that the visitors had apparently eluded the majority of their persecutors. The women were hurrying into their protective limousines, which were snorting at the side entrance. Flotsam and Jetsam stood idly by while the mission superintendent uttered sad apologies as he shook hands with Mr. Hudson Montmort Hubert. Suddenly the latter turned and faced Careless Riley.

"Ah, you are the—er—noble fellow who acted so—er—handsomely in the hall. I should like to do something to encourage heroism in your walk of life—would you mind?"

The swell forced a hundred-dollar bill into the hand of the crook.

"Back to the Ritz-Carlton, Sport!" said Riley good naturedly. "Easy money ain't what I'm lookin' for tonight; besides I heerd yer lecture, and I'm wise that Charity breeds idleness in the Lower Classes. What I've know about that?" said Careless Riley, dropping the hundred-dollar bill back into the white-gloved hand.

"But, my good man," said the patron of the poor, "you've done a valuable service to me."

"Yes, I know," said Riley. "It's right and proper in your set to pay cash for services rendered. Why don't you offer me somethin' I need, Boss? What I want's company—good company. Would you mind steppin' over to Carlo's joint and havin' a bite to eat—on me?"

The millionaire hesitated, obviously flattered by this condescension on the part of an inferior. Ah! there was a chance to come in intimate contact with that fascinating Outer Race, the Lower Classes! What though the lordly pauper chose to stand there?

Mrs. Bentram-Gay leaned sulkily among her furs. Hubert had come in her car.

"Oh, don't worry about the price," said Riley, misinterpreting the delay. "Everything's on me—won't cost you a bean. I'll even blow you to a back ride there and back."

Hubert leaned into the door of the limousine and addressed the woman. Riley could hear the latter say something about "proving my principles," while Mrs. Bentram-Gay's soprano tones responded, "Horrid people—ingratitude—never again—come to luncheon," and the limousine started scornfully away, leaving the burglar and the millionaire to haul a lumping sack and fare away to Carlo's Oyster House, the pride of Third-ave.

IF it is fitting that a brass plate should be set reverently in the wall at the sign of the Cheshire Cheese in London, behind the bench where Dr. Samuel Johnson was wont to curl his thoughtful legs, why is it not equally proper that a bronze tablet should be greaved and graven in a little back room at Carlo's to celebrate the fact that in that very chair, at that very table, Tim Sullivan the Greater once sat for forty-five magnificent minutes and declared that Carlo could cook an onion better than DeMoulin? There is no answer to this question except to say that Justice has gone mad among the gods.

At Carlo's historic but imitated table the Hubert of glorious name sat and faced the Riley of glorious adices. Beside each stood a beaker of Ouzar brown; between them reposed a double portwine; and over the smothered in the vegetable that made Bermuda famous for something besides blues.

"Eat hearty, Duke," the burglar was saying. "Let me give you a little slash off the oyster with some of these German violets on the edge."

"How do you argue, Mr. —?" began the rich man, passing his plate.

"Fitzpatrick," supplied Riley lightly.

"How do you argue, Mr. Fitzpatrick, that Poverty is not the ideal state of Happiness, as I was about to prove when my lecture was—interrupted?"

"Your Blessed Panhandle stuff is all to the Matten-wan," said Riley, as simply as he knew how. "You can pull that line of talk on Chuck Connors, and he'll listen as long as you buy the drinks. That's his business. But you can't put it over with me. I've took my meals on Hard Luck Alley for a long time, Boss, and I've watched 'em booze and fight and grow crooked. Happiness? Gee!"

"But Abraham Lincoln began as a poor boy," suggested Hubert.

"Cut out the Abe Lincoln dope," said Riley. "Abe wasn't a poor boy—not in our sense. He had all out-doors, woods, and trees and a Bible trainin' to start with—he was right! But look at the gus down here,—born with cotton! but a thirst and spendin' their lives improvin' on their inheritance! Say, what's the use of your blowin' in all diked out in John Dews, and passin' out a cure for unhappiness? Those plugs at the mission may be panhandlers; but they ain't rules. Trust them to tell the difference between the Old Dr. Gummel treatment and the real stuff you get at the Rockefeller Institute. Twenty-three for your Sure Cure, Sport."

"But why aren't the Poor as fortunate, at least, as the Rich?" persisted Hubert. "Look at this steak we're eatin'! I doubt if you can get anything better even at Sherry's."

"Say, do you think the buns and the stiffs at the mission ever feel their faces here—ad Carlo's?" gasped Riley.

"Why, to be sure—isn't this a typical slum restaurant?"

"Gee! You are a come-on!" snorted the crook. "Why, Man, Whisky Charley and the Mission Gang could no more feel at this leanness than I could butt into Sherry's

in a bathing suit. This is the Candy Headquarters. The District Leader eats here."

"But the fellows I saw at the mission—where do they eat?"

"They don't eat; they drink," said Riley.

"They have no one to blame but themselves," snapped Hubert with some resentment. "But you are an example of what I mean. You are able to indulge in the plain, wholesome comforts of this place as a sort of reward, I dare say, for your honest, industrious life."

The pearl necklace turned over twice in Riley's pocket, and the stolen stickpin jabbed him sharply like the business end of Conscience.

"I got the advantage of knowin' a good trade," said the thief airily; "yet I don't want you to con yourself into thinkin' that I'm jolliest when I'm down and out. No, Sir, the poor man is the full guy all the time! I've slept in Salvation Army Homes, and I've peeped into a few bedrooms in the Hotel St. Regis. Honest, there's no comparison. Maybe it makes the first ticket chopper feel kind o' refined and exalted to take his stew off the oilcloth next to the kitchen stove; but I can't see where he's got it on the grater who owns the subway and can lean against Spanish lace while a Hungarian Count wearin' brass buttons drops a parasol onto his plate with a silver jummy. Gee! some o' the private mansions I've seen! You'd be surprised."

YOU have the entry to many mansions?" asked Hubert rather superciliously.

"Lots of 'em—in a business way," admitted Riley.

"What is your business?" inquired the millionaire.

"I'm a mechanic," said Riley. "Doors and windows my specialty. Sorry I ain't got my card along." He pulled a long Havana and blew smoke reflectively. "Some o' the private mansions I've seen!" he repeated. "I had a job in a house just today, all the bedroom furniture was some sort o' swell brown wood inlaid with pictures o' hollyhocks and tomatoes and canary birds, and the whole thing done in solid wood—Gee!"

"Dutch marquetry," explained the rich man.

"Perhaps—and the beds so soft and springy you couldn't lay down in 'em without bouncin' to the ceiling. It puts a guy to sleep just to look at a bed like that. And what I've think about the bureau drawers?" The burglar lowered his voice confidentially. "They was run on ball bearings and lined with glass!"

"You made a careful investigation," laughed Hubert.

"Sure Mike! I was doin' the job for an easy guy. And you should a seen the bathroom. The tub and washstand chiseled out o' that candy marble stuff—they call it bronze, don't they?"

"Gee," said the millionaire.

"Say, if any o' those buns up to the mission ever seen a skin laundry like that, they'd go back on their principles with a soapy splash. And out in the big dance hall the woodwork was all whittled fancy and the walls was hung with the real handpainted article by Andor or some of the Old Masters. And the rug! Say, try was so soft and affectionate they seemed to say 'Thank you, Boss,' every time you set foot on 'em! Gee! what a fireplace! Solid carved stone a mile high, a fig and handsome as Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and that pian! Think of a grand square waltz box with solid gold legs and statues of Greek suffragettes all up and down the sides! That was sure some music taster!"

"Do you envy the owners their pianos too?" asked the Great Man.

"No. All right to look at, maybe; but I ain't got a yen-yen for pianos. I can't play 'em, and they're too heavy to carry away."

"If you owned that piano and those pictures and rugs, you too might realize the idleness, the futility, of it all," sighed Hubert.

"Say, Boss, what is your growth on the Wealthy Bunch, anyhow?" asked the crook.

"I've lived with it," said the rich man. "I've seen good men become bad after years of systematic stuffing. You speak of the children of the slums born with a thirst; the children of our set are created with rills and appetites. And the pity is they are given the means to satisfy them. All the sycophants of the earth flock to us with their spurious goods. We buy them. How do we encourage Art? By paying fabulous sums to dealers for the work of artists who died of want two hundred years ago. How do we encourage honesty? By supporting crooked race tracks and vend Legislatures. How do we promote decency? By livin' all the pearls of India on the bodies of dancing women."

Hubert lit a fresh cigar. The precious necklace took another half-bitch in Riley's pocket.

"My good fellow," said the millionaire in a low voice as he leaned far over the table, "I don't know whether a heavy stroke of fortune will ever fall to you in your honest walk of life; but if it ever does marry a sensible woman, buy a farm, and stay there. Don't linger in the city a day; because, if you do, your honor will be turned into jewels for some unworthy woman to wear round her neck."

RILEY swallowed hard before he answered. "Mr. Hubert," he said, "I don't know how you guessed it, but I have struck the big Turn o' Fortune—last night. I ain't got any business in New York at this minute; but when I dropped into the mission to hear your Yawp about Poverty I was delectin' somethin' in my mind. There's a musical specialty girl up to the Little Alhambra Movin' Picture Palace. If I crawled up to her and laid a string o' pearls at her feet, she'd wouldn't ask me where I got 'em; but I'd never see the pearls again."

"I know," said Hubert, nodding wisely.

"There's another girl you kin' in a little beefsteak factory near here. She ain't ligge'n a whisper, and

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## CARELESS RILEY BUYS THE SUPPER

Continued from page 4

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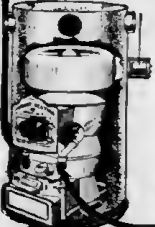
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her hair matches her freckles. Her name's a plain, home cooked article like Matty Kennedy. She's a private character, Matty is. Whenever I see her somethin' deep down in my soul says, 'Own yer own home!' If I came at Matty with a string of sparkles she'd asked me where I frisked 'em and make me take 'em back.

"You're not hesitating between these two women, are you?" asked Hubert.

"I was—till I talked with you," confessed the crook. "You see, some very important business is callin' me out o' town tonight. The 14th-st. queen would be with me till the money played out; but the biscuit shooter'd require a marriage license and the consent of her mother."

"Ask the biscuit shooter," said Hubert earnestly. "It may be inconvenient, it's always inconvenient, to be decent; but ask her—before you go."

"I know a place Out West, 'way beyond Pennsylvania, where a guy can take up a farm without bein' bothered by Society. She could meet me there and we could get a Gospel referee to start the mill."

"You'd never regret it, Fitzpatrick," said the millionaire. "You and your wife would benefit by the freer, more wholesome surroundings—"

"Yes, I would," said Riley.

Hubert stirred in his chair and glanced at his watch—Riley appraised the jeweled case with professional eye. It was a quarter to twelve. The burglar rose hastily. There was a westbound train at half-past one, and new pastures were calling him. Carefully he extracted a ten-dollar bill from the jumble of swag in his pocket. He called the waiter and paid his score as Hubert adjusted his fur coat.

"Time's pretty valuable with me," said Riley; "but I don't grudge the hour we've spent here chewin' the tapestry. You've blown me to some good advice on two or three things, Cap'n, and I want to hand you back the change. Drop the Happy Poverty rag when you're talkin' to the bums in this

section. Or if you want the Down and Out Club to agree with you, slip 'em ten dollars apiece first, then say anything you want to. Great wealth may be sinful and demoralizin' like you say; but I bet the roll in my inside pocket that if Whisky Charlie was raised in an Elysian-carved mansion like I just told you about he'd get some higher amusement out of his hoozie than goin' to sleep back of Dan's Place with his head in a coal scuttle."

The rickety cab was waiting outside.

"I hope we've done something toward strengthening the bond of sympathy between our Classes," said the millionaire, smiling, as he held out his hand.

"I kind o' feel there's lots o' things that you and me share together," said the burglar, pressing the clean hand cautiously.

"And there's one thing, Fitzpatrick," said Hubert. "Have you got that string of pearls you thought of giving that actress?"

"Yes, Boss, I still got it," admitted Riley nervously.

"Keep two or three of the pearls and have a modest brooch made for the Other Girl," said Hubert. "Sell the rest and put the money into developing your little farm."

HUBERT leaned from the cab and directed the driver to a well known number on Park-ave. The iron jaw of Careless Riley dropped suddenly as he watched the retreating vehicle.

"Say, Cull," he said at last, tossing a quarter to a loafer who had been standing near, "what address did that swell say to the driver?"

The loafer repeated a well known number on Park-ave.

"Well, Careless," soliloquized the crook as he started off at a brisk pace, "it's me to 'phone the happy word to Matty Kennedy."

God bless 'er—then to pull my freight to Fairway Junction. And, say, when that Hubert boy gets home and finds it's his house I've been burglarizing, I bet he lets out a roar that makes the elevated railroad sound like a maiden's prayer!"

## INDEMNITY

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and beating their flat breasts in a frenzy whose blindness protected him and the woman at his side. Unconsciously they held hands as they ran.

"Drop behind!" at length she whispered gaspingly.

They were before a house streaming light from every hole and crack of its one-story flimsiness. The mob swept over the porch with awful din. But they were left behind unnoticed. They drew up against the corner of the shanty, panting. Lee gave one curious glance in at the window nearest, then drew back, a shudder running through his frame.

"Don't look!" he entreated.

"I know, it's a wake. They have 'it' sitting in a chair looking on, don't they?" she answered wearily.

"The room is papered with 'Illustrated London News' and pictures of saints," he tried to speak facetiously, "and we arrived with the hired mourners—"

"Come!" she urged. "No one has followed us."

"What about Jack? I shouldn't have left him out there," Lee accused himself.

"Oh, you needn't worry about Jack now," she said proudly. "The word of your danger was like an elixir. It was wonderful!"

"I noticed—"

"He's gone to get the men from the launch as an escort."

They were silent. A memory of the old intimacy with all its slowness came between them.

They made several turns in the noisome narrow streets, passing here and there black figures moving listlessly about, and came quite suddenly upon the Consulate. The bony old servant was at the door.

LEE dropped the indemnity on the table and turned to look at Vera Carroll.

She was starting the lights, her black envelop thrown aside. The cloud dress clung to her slight figure in crushed folds like a closing morning glory; swirls of the torn fabric followed her in dejected little eddies. Her hair had sagged from its glorious heights to childish disorder.

She drew out a chair for him, unlocked a cabinet, took out a decanter. "I'm afraid there isn't any ice," she said, with her whimsical smile.

Her voice on the deathlike stillness

brought Lee from his thoughts. He reached out and took her by the shoulders, making her look at him.

"I'm not going to say anything about what I owe you and Jack—for tonight—"

"Why, I brought Jack back to himself! We owe you that, you see," she interrupted nervously; but his hands remained.

"No; but you do owe me your faith and trust, Vera," he went on firmly. "For four years—since—well, since you turned my life out of its old course, I've been trying to make myself worthy of it. I never was worthy of your love—I never could ask for that again—but I want to live clean and straight to feel good enough to help you—if you ever needed me. And now is my time to demand. You've got to let me take you out of here! You owe it to me, Girl!" But she was gone.

Lee looked ruefully at his empty hands still outstretched. A faint whir sounded on the stairs.

"My God! I believe I shook her!" he groaned. "Now I have done it—brute!"

He wanted to strike out into the night and knock his head against something hard. But automatically he fell to counting the indemnity, stacking it in front of him methodically,—twenties—tens—fives—and even miserable two and a halves. It was all there. He thought of how Vera had pressed against him, putting in those last coins.

Then, with drawn face supported between his hands, he sat there grimly reviewing the quick horror of this night. At last the tender thoughts he had so resolutely shut out returned with an invading rush.

"She's safe and sound, thank God! But she risked her life," his thoughts pursued, "for me!" He covered his eyes as if that could shut away the hope he felt he could not honestly take.

Dull, regular vibrations of marching feet reached the Consulate, and he sprang to his feet and started forward—and once again he found Vera Carroll waiting there. She was in the white frock, just as before; but now—her hands fluttered in a gesture of offering something, of giving, of surrender.

Speechless, the man went to her, bent down, and fumbled her round. Not with words, not even with meeting eyes, did they pledge themselves in this new hour. Presently he moved and let himself kiss her with

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